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OF

SERMONS

PREACHED BY

HENRY WARD BEECHER.

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THE LIBERTY OF THE GOSPEL.

I propose to comment upon the history contained in the 21st chapter of the Book of Acts, beginning with the 15th, and ending with the 26th verse.

"And after those days we took up our carriages, and went to Jerusalem. There went with us also certain other disciples of Cæsarea, and brought with them one Mnason of Cyprus, an old disciple, with whom we should lodge. And when we were come to Jerusalem, the brethren received us gladly. And the day following Paul went with us unto James; and all the elders were present. And when he had saluted them, he declared particularly what things God had wrought among the Gentiles by his ministry."

I can scarcely understand why the salutation should have been mentioned, unless Paul's habit was that of an especially perfect gentleman. He went to Jerusalem, and was received into a company of prominent Christians; and there must have been something very affectionate in the mode of salutation which he bestowed on them, or he could hardly have made such an impression as is indicated by the record.

"*When he had saluted them*, he declared particularly what things God had wrought among the Gentiles by his ministry."

This was a conference-meeting at which one might well have desired to be present. Even for the least disciple who has been active in any good word or work, there is always a willing ear and a ready heart. But to have heard Paul—a man of such universal nature in spiritual directions; a man who had traversed every region, almost, of the then civilized world; a man who had a breadth of experience such as, perhaps, can never fall to the lot of any other man—to have heard him give some account of his own personal history, was a privilege devoutly to be wished for.

I remember very well to have heard Mr. Nettleton, when he used to return from his tours of revival labors to the old house of my father in Litchfield, recount the scenes of the revivals which he had gone through in Danbury, or Woodbury, or wherever he had been working; and certainly, even to me, a little child, they were golden hours; and to my father and to him they were hours of triumph beyond the ordinary experiences of men in the flesh. But what were these as compared with the hours spent in an assembly

SUNDAY MORNING, Mar. 19, 1871. LESSON: ACTS XV. 1-33. HYMNS (Plymouth Collection): Nos. 40, 688, 1262.

where James, the brother of our Lord, presided, and where members of the Christian church of Jerusalem listened to the Apostle Paul recounting what he had seen, and heard, and thought, and felt, and done, all over the Roman empire!

"And when they heard it, they glorified the Lord, and said unto him, Thou seest, brother, how many thousands of Jews there are which believe; and they are all jealous of the law, [the law of Moses]."

The transition seems a little singular here. After Paul had told of his revival labors, they broke out into a triumphant strain, and glorified God; and then they said unto him,

"Thou seest, brother, how many thousands of Jews there are which believe; and they are all jealous of the law: and they are informed of thee, that thou teachest all the Jews which are among the Gentiles to forsake Moses, saying that they ought not to circumcise their children, neither to walk after the customs."

Though they were in a rapturous feeling of divine love, they were yet most tender-hearted in respect to the Mosaic law in Jerusalem. And they went on to say,

"What is it, therefore? the multitude must needs come together: for they will hear that thou art come."

So, then, you see that Paul had his orthodoxy suspected in Jerusalem. Would it not seem strange to you to hear that John Knox was suspected of being heretical in Edinburgh? or that Jonathan Edwards was suspected of being unsound in Northampton? or that John Calvin was suspected of being lenient and lax in Geneva? And does it not seem strange that St. Paul, in Jerusalem, was not regarded as having got up to the highest mark as a religious man? So it was. It was not openly charged that he was not orthodox. There were rumors to that effect, but no charges—none whatever. The case was probably this: that when Paul's name was mentioned among the assemblies of Christians in Jerusalem, they used to say, "Yes, a very zealous man; but I am *afraid*." "What are you afraid of?" "Well, I should not like to say. I would rather not talk about these things, for I hope it will all turn out right." At other times his name would be mentioned in connection with some transcendent work; and they would say, "O, yes, Paul is a successful worker. He has the art of stirring up communities. He is very influential. But then——well, I *hope* it will all turn out right!" And so, after twenty years of earnest, faithful labor in almost all the civilized world, Paul came to Jerusalem to find that he was not "orthodox" according to the views of Christians there. He found that they held him in doubt. And this is all the more extraordinary considering that these men were most of them Christians.

The elders, by the voice of James, the brother of our Lord, who

presided—the oldest man, and doubtless the natural leader of the brethren there—said to Paul,

"Do, therefore, this that we say to thee: We have four men which have a vow on them [according to the Mosaic system]; them take, and purify thyself with them, and be at charges with them, that they may shave their heads; and all may know that those things whereof they were informed concerning thee, are nothing; but that thou thyself also walkest orderly, and keepest the law."

That was as much as to say, "Your orthodoxy is suspected. Now, do you go in and subscribe to the entire Confession of Faith, and accept it whole, in the midst of all the people; and then they will say that you are orthodox and sound." Says this council in Jerusalem to the apostle Paul, the most successful and zealous man that ever labored in the Christian ministry, "Go into the temple as though you had never heard of Christ, and make yourself a thorough Jew in their sight. Here are four men, Nazarites: you go with them and pay their charges"—or pay charges with them. Some think that they were poor and could not pay their own charges and so absolve themselves from their vow, and that Paul was to pay their charges for them: others think that he was simply to stand with them, and be recognized with them as under a vow. When a Nazarite made a vow, it required his abstenation from intoxicating drinks. It forbade him to cut his hair. It forbade him to touch anything, under any circumstances, that had died. A Nazarite vow, at the time of our Saviour and during the times of the apostles, could not last less than thirty days. It might last longer.

And so here were these men; and the Apostle Paul was to join them, and to present himself with them with three offerings—a he-lamb, for a sin-offering; a ewe-lamb, for a burnt-offering; and a ram, for a thank-offering.

This was what was recommended him to do: To go into the temple, as though all his prejudices were orthodox, and so place himself on a footing with his countrymen, and to do it on purpose to produce the impression on his fellow-Christians of the Jewish nation, that he, like them, had not abandoned Moses, but that he was "orderly"—that is, that he was in the very way of his fathers.

They said to him:

"As touching the Gentiles which believe, we have written and concluded that they observe no such thing, save only that they keep themselves from things offered to idols, and from blood, and from strangled, and from fornication."

That is, Jews must go after the manner of the Jews; but with a few exceptions, for special reasons, Gentiles are not to be burdened with Jewish ceremonials. They may go after the manner of the Gentiles. That was the declaration of the council.

"Then Paul took the men, and the next day purifying himself with them entered into the temple, to signify the accomplishment of the days of purification, until that an offering should be offered for every one of them.

This history of the primitive church in Jerusalem is one of the most extraordinary, I think, in the New Testament, when all its hidden significance is brought out.

1. It strikes us as very strange indeed, that Paul himself should not have sufficiently vindicated his adhesion to the national faith, and that he should have been laid under suspicion. It does not follow, however, that all men who are suspected are like Paul. It does not follow that a man may not be justly suspected. But it does show that when, in any nation, or at any period, a man undertakes to develop a higher obligation out of a lower one, a religious life out of a dead form, a vital spirit from a dogma, or the full truth from its seed, he renders himself liable to misapprehension, as one that is abandoning the faith. That which people love to hear, is what they have been accustomed to hear—only they like to hear it in an original form. They like to see the same truths, but they like to see them dressed differently. The ideas that men have been educated in; the views that men have held from time immemorial, become, in some sense, parts of their selfness. They identify themselves with those views. And when men preach them again, with vivacity, and with glowing illustration, and with power, it is a kind of subtle compliment to their believing them already. Men like old things in new clothes. And in Paul's time they liked to hear the Apostles preach just what they had always believed, only making it more plain. Self-love says, "We knew that we were right; and now we see how gloriously right we have been."

When one undertakes to develop out of an imperfect morality a higher morality, just in proportion as he goes from leaf to blossom, or from blossom to cluster, he renders himself liable to be apprehended for having abandoned the faith. The Christian Jews had accepted Christ. They had believed in him. They had adhered to him by the power of faith. And yet they could not bear to break away from the temple, nor from the routine regularity of the Mosaic law. So, when they heard that Paul had no objection to circumcision, but did not care for circumcision; that he had no objection to sacrifice, but that he did not consider sacrifice as necessary, they said, "This Paul is an invader of settled opinions; this Paul is a dangerous man. He may be right; but you cannot tell where all this will end. Probably he will go to Hellenic views, and become a teacher of false philosophies"—and that, because he held the whole economy of Moses in a higher sense, and with a nobler purpose, than they did who suspected him!

The question should be always this, in regard to new views or ideas that are presented: Do the new doctrines tend to loosen moral obligation? Do they tend to give larger liberty to the under man than to the upper man? Do they tend to produce spirituality, or its lack? Are they lowering the moral standard, or are they raising it? For, whatever brings new motives to the higher spiritual life; whatever tends to carry men up toward faith, and love, and disinterested activity, cannot be far wrong.

2. This scene reveals the fact that some thirty years after Christ's death (some chronologists say twenty-eight, and some thirty), the Christians of Jerusalem were in full communion with the Jewish temple. After our Saviour had been gone from the earth from twenty-eight to thirty years, the whole assembly of Christians, with James, the brother of our Lord, at their head, the whole central, mother Church, in Jerusalem, were in full communion with the temple. We have the most explicit testimony of this.

"When they heard it, they glorified the Lord, and said unto him, Thou seest, brother, how many thousands of Jews there are which believe; and they are all jealous of the law."

They all yet believed in Moses. They all believed in the ceremonies and ways of the temple. Well, what of that? A good deal of that, if you will only consider its meaning.

Where, then, is the claim that Jesus delivered to his apostles, or that he in any wise shaped out, a Christian Church, or a Christian polity? Here, thirty years after Christ's ascension, but a few steps from the very place where he offered himself as a sacrifice, was the Mother Church still making offerings and sacrifices in the old Jewish temple! Nay, so tenacious were they that the temple-worship should be observed, that, by the authority of James, the brother of our Lord, and by the consent of the whole Church, the chief apostle of the New Dispensation was made ostentatiously to go through a portion of the distinctively Mosaic ceremonial, in order to approve himself to the Church in Jerusalem. And yet, how many ten thousand times, in ten thousand books, has it been said that our Lord told the apostles just how the Church was to be fixed; just how its frame was to be laid down; just what were to be its ordinances and policy and worship, while here we find that thirty years afterward those very men yet served God in the temple!

Where, then, is your prescribed polity? Where are your priestly orders, your authoritatively ordained ceremonies? Where is your exact, systematic worship? Where are your High and Low schools? The fact cannot be gainsaid that the Christians in Jerusalem had no idea of a church organization thirty years after Christ's ascension.

The inference is irresistible. Why, do you suppose that if our Lord had said to the disciples, or to the apostles, "Such is to be the pattern of Church service," they would have forgotten it so soon? Had he ordained any system of worship, and told his followers that that was the pattern of his future Church, would they not have remembered it, and acted accordingly? And yet, there was nothing which indicated that they had received any such instructions from the Master.

You cannot find one word that was uttered by Christ which can be construed into an indication of an outward form for his Church. Nor can you find in the primitive teachings of the apostles themselves the claim that there was any form whatever prescribed for the Church. And all that which has passed into the faith of modern times in respect to the external form of the Church, is absolutely of human invention. It is none the worse for that; but the divine and binding authority of the external forms, and ordinances, and ceremonies connected with church life, is gone, if it is pretended that such authority is derived mainly from the apostles, or still higher, from Christ. For they gave no such authority.

The Christian scheme was not a philosophy. It was not a capitulary of great truths. It was still less an organization. The Christian scheme was something far transcending a philosophy. It was something far nobler than an organization. It was an inspiration. It was a divine afflatus. It was a power introduced into the world by which the best impulses of men should be led up toward ideal life. The central peculiarity of Christianity was this: It prescribed a life transcending all ordinary attainments, and then brought a moral pressure to bear upon men, to carry them up to that life. It neither taught, nor was designed to teach, a philosophy. It said neither, "These things are true," nor, "These things are not true." It left men to find out for themselves whether they were true or not. And from the time of Christ to our day, Christian theology has been growing according to the analogy of any other system. It has had to pass through precisely the same experience that any other form of philosophy passes through. And church organizations were not ordained to be just so, and just so many. They have gone on increasing until the number of them is very large; and we shall still have more of them. But it is not of these that I designed to speak. I will now merely speak of the Church in the sense of its having one external form.

In our Master's teachings, and in the teachings of the apostles and disciples, there is no hint that there was to be a single outward organization after a given pattern. The disciples were to assemble,

they were to organize, they were to worship,—but, the spirit being right the method in all cases was to be determined by experience. And if there was to be a different external form of organization, the Church at Jerusalem, the mother Church of all, did not know it, and was still in the temple, and did not hesitate to make Paul go there, and offer up sacrifices, thirty years after the death of Christ. Thirty years before, one great Sacrifice for all had been offered up. Thirty years before, the outward altar had been really smitten; but it had not yet been set aside. And they had not found it out, and were attempting to carry on both the inward spirit of Christ and the external economy of the Jews.

3. It is also shown, here, that the apostles put the Jews and the Gentiles upon a different footing in regard to ethical duties; that the things which were binding on the Jews were not binding on the Gentiles; and *vice versa.* In other words, the apostles did not set out with one definite economy for all nations. Holiness of life was to be universal. But all externals of worship and government were to vary with the circumstances of differing nations. When among one class, early Christians insisted upon the law of Moses—circumcision and sacrifices; and when they were among another class, they waived these things. They said to the Gentiles outside of Jerusalem, "This yoke is not to be laid on you. You are not to be circumcised nor to offer sacrifices." But in Jerusalem men were not to evade the service of the Temple. And how is this consistent with one uniform administration—one uniform ritual—one system of universal ordinances?

They said to Paul, "You being a Jew, go and perform the duties of a Jew, and show that you are sound, and that you do believe in Moses, and in sacrifices, and in the temple. But," said they, "we have told those people in yonder city that all they need to do is, not touch blood, or things offered to idols, and to keep themselves from fornication."

Does not this show that different men, under different circumstances, are to be treated differently? Does it not show that men must be educated to a certain point before you can successfully attempt to take them from the animal up to the spiritual life?

In the sight of the apostles, men's prejudices and ignorance were realities, and were not treated with rude assault, but were taken into tender consideration.

Suppose a surgeon should go into a household where a man had a vast wen on his neck, and, while he shook hands with him very gently with one hand, should hit the wen a terrible blow with the other? and suppose, when the man complained that that was rude

treatment, the surgeon should say, "Oh, that is nothing but a wen. It is no part of you. I have no idea of respecting your wen. I respect *you*; but that wen has nothing to do with you?" Such a surgeon would be like many reformers, who, because they are men of truth, and perceiving that other men have many prejudices and superstitions, strike them with their fists, as if they were wens, justifying themselves by saying, "They are superstitions; they are prejudices: am I bound to respect these?" No, perhaps not; but you are bound to respect the palpitating heart that lies behind them. You are bound to respect the soul whose superstition or prejudice you assail.

See how gentle the apostles were. See how they said to the Gentile converts, "You may act according to this simple rule;" and see how they turned to Paul, and said, "The brethren in Jerusalem will not understand it if you take your higher view of spiritual life and act according to that. By so doing you will tread on their educated notions. You will grieve and wound them. You will make yourself a hinderance in their way. You will be suspected of infidelity. Now put yourself in line with them." And Paul did.

"To them that are under the law, as under the law;" "to them that are without law, as without law, (being not without law to God, but under the law to Christ)."

It is as if he had said, "I did not give up principle. I was held by a principle; but it was a higher one."

Now is not this liberality a genuine thing? Is it not conformable to the wisdom of love? Is it not conformable to the indispensable necessities of the human family?

Men are blamed because they are breaking away from this or that system. They are called heretics because they do not walk more according to the customs of their fathers. A man should do both things, as far as it is necessary to promote charity: he should reach toward a higher spirituality, in order to lead men up still further; and he has at the same time the liberty of conforming or non-conforming to the regular customs of the community in which he dwells. And in both instances he is so to do it as not to offend. It is to be done as a work of true spirituality; as a means of developing a higher life.

According to this action of the apostle, principles were proclaimed, and then the adaptations of them were left to circumstances. The spirit first, and then the form. If the spirit be right, the principle may safely be left to shape itself. And this is the substance of the testimony of the church of Christ in Jerusalem.

4. What shall we say to Paul's remarkable conduct under this advice? Having been a Pharisee, it is not at all remarkable that

by rebound his ideas of Christian liberty should have become the largest, and that he should have become an apostle to the Gentiles, even more eminently than Peter himself was. Nowhere is personal liberty more insisted upon than in the writings of the apostle Paul. Nowhere shall you find such a noble tribute paid to the authority, and the sole authority of the conscience, the moral sense of man, as contrasted with the authority of law or of ceremony, as in his letters. He declares that a man who is truly in Christ Jesus; who is learned in the spirit of Christ; in other words, that a man who has grown into this higher spirituality, with its intuitions, and its inspirations, will have that which will stand him in stead of all rules and of all ordinances, and of services of every description; that he will be a law unto himself. He resented any intrusion on his personal liberty; and he was jealous for the personal liberty of other men. For more than twenty years he had been preaching this grand doctrine of individual liberty in Christ. He had tested the sufficiency of the Mosaic economy, and had declared that it had failed, through the weakness of the flesh, to bring to pass the thing for which it was ordained. Nay, he had declared that if men went back to it, they abandoned Christ.

And yet, after having preached so long, that Christ was a sufficient sacrifice, and that faith in Christ was a substitute and perfect fulfillment of the whole law, the moment he went up to Jerusalem, and found that he could relieve the consciences of men in the church there by conforming to the law of Moses, he did it. He again offered sacrifices!

Was not that insincere? Well, it would have been insincere under certain circumstances. If he had believed that abstinence from these ceremonies was obligatory, then he would have been insincere. If he had believed, as the Friends or Quakers do, that outward forms must not be used, because they were forbidden by the revelation of the higher life in the Spirit, then he would have been insincere. If he had believed, as do the high church party in any denomination (for every denomination has its high-church party) that there was an exact plan and system ordained of God, and that those who conformed to that system were right, and that those who did not were wrong, then he would have been insincere. But he believed, that *in Christ Jesus, neither circumcision availed anything, nor uncircumcision, but a new creature.*

This is it. When a man has risen from his lower nature, so that he sees God face to face; when by invisible truths he learns to love God and man, he is in a state in which many things are indifferent to him which would be important under a lower condition. There is an

antinomianism which is spiritually true; and there is an antinomianism which is immoral and debauching; but when one has risen to such a state of moral feeling that he can see God and commune with him, it makes no difference to him whether he observes this and that custom or ordinance or not. He is not affected by baptism one way or the other. He may take it, or he may neglect it. He may partake of the ordinance of the Lord's Supper, or he may go without it. These things are helps; but if a man has risen to that state in which he already possesses the Divine Spirit, and is a new creature in Christ Jesus, he is no longer beholden to them. But they are not forbidden to him. He may, therefore, sit down in the temple and take meat that is offered to an idol, and it will make no difference. It will make no difference whether or not he eats herbs or meat. The thing for which all ordinances and governments are appointed, is to instruct men, to exalt them from animal conditions, and to bring them into a higher spiritual nature. And when one is brought up there, he may abide there if he can without any external ordinances: or, if he please, he may observe such ordinances. They are not masters, but instruments.

And so, though Paul had preached that men were not to be circumcised, when he went into Jerusalem, and found that a good end would be served by it, he permitted it. When, before he went to Jerusalem, he saw that it would be a yoke upon the Gentile converts to be held by the Mosaic economy, he told them that they were not bound by it; but when he went to Jerusalem, and found that the Jewish Christians would suppose that he had departed from the faith of the Fathers, and that it would overthrow their confidence in him, because he did not believe in the Mosaic economy, then he conformed.

I know how insincere this will seem to you. But it is because you are under the bondage of external form. It is because you do not yet understand the masterhood of the Spirit. Christ's Kingdom is within us. To Him belongs all that is spiritual. All the external church is human.

Now, in regard to all outside things pertaining to religion, and to churches, and to the whole economy of ordinances and doctrines, you may have them if you can make anything out of them; and if you do not want them, you may go without them. Though, when you go among men that hold them, you will sometimes, for their sake, observe them. You will be to them that are under the law, *as* under the law.

I should not hesitate, if I went into a Roman Catholic church, and all that went with me believed that perhaps I was a Christian,

and dipped their finger in the holy water and made the sign of the cross, to dip my finger in the holy water and make the sign of the cross. I have as much right to the cross as they have; and as to the holy water, if it did not do me any good, it certainly would not do me any hurt.

"Yes, but do not you give encouragement to their wrong beliefs and superstitions?" No more than Paul did to the wrong beliefs and superstitions of the men that stood around about the altar in the temple.

But on the other hand, is there not such a thing as having sympathy with a heart that is bound by superstition? Is it the best way to cure superstition to treat it rudely? Would not treating it tenderly, in such a way as to give a man confidence in your desire to benefit him, be more likely to effect a cure? Is it not wiser to show a man by your gentleness that you regard his feelings, than rudely to tread them under foot? Some things are sacred to one man which are not sacred to another; and each should respect the things which are sacred to the other. Your sacred things ought to be respected by me, and my sacred things ought to be respected by you. But I am not bound to conform to all that you regard as imperative; and you are not bound to conform to all that I regard as imperative. Love gives universal liberty in these things. The spirit of love and faith sets me free from the bondage of ceremony, ordinances, and services, and says to me, "Use them if you need them, and use any of them that you need"; and it says to me, "If you do not need them, you are not bound to use them."

I do not keep Sunday because I think it is obligatory in the sense that the love of God is obligatory. I keep Sunday because I like to keep it; because it is a day of sweetness to my soul. It is my heart's delight; it is honorable to me; and therefore I keep it. I am not bound by days. I am not bound by services or ceremonies. I feel at liberty on the Sabbath day to seek my sanctuary in the forest. Men say to me, "May I worship God in the field?" I say to them, "If you are called to worship God in the field, yes." I may pass a criticism on the sincerity of your claim if I see that you do not want to worship at all, and that you make this a pretext; but if I see that you have a conscience, or spiritual sense, and that the sounding sea, or the leafy forest, or the open fields, with the chanting insects and choiring birds, are instruments of God's grace to you, I say, "In God's name go, dear soul." If you are a child of God, you have a right to seek your Father's presence wherever you can find him in the broad universe, as the bird flies where it will in the pathless air.

The soul that is found out of Christ; the soul that is awakened by the fire of divine love; the soul that is learning to speak the language of Zion; the soul that is hearing and seeing and feeling according as it is taught of God—that soul is its own legislator. And it may go through the tranquility of the unspeaking Quaker Church; it may go through the zealous joyfulness of the Methodist Church; it may go through the polished coldness of the Presbyterian Church, or the didactic Congregational Church; it may go through the stately and complex services of the all-proper Episcopal Church; it may go by the Bishop, or with him, or through him, or over him, or under him; it may go in one way or another; it may go as it pleases—only let it go, *go*, GO!

And for all these heresies (they are shocking heresies I know, in these modern times), I plead the example of the Church in Jerusalem, that worshiped by making sacrifices at the altar, in the temple, thirty years after the death of Christ. I plead the example of the apostles, which is two thousand years old—and the age of a thing, from wine up to creeds, is generally a test of its excellence!

We are prepared, now, to consider some of the difficulties which beset the consciences of men. There has been a great deal of dispute among good and conscientious men as to the doctrine of social responsibility; as to the liability of men in regard to the faith of those whom they countenance. It has come to pass that in a certain organization designed to work for the spread of morality, where those of whom it is composed are well-taught orthodox young men, if those who are invited to coöperate are sadly taught Unitarian youths, at first there is great hesitation; and secondly, there is more than hesitation—there is great conscientiousness—on the part of those who are orthodox. And they say, "We cannot associate with men who deny the Lord that bought them. If we do we shall become partakers of their sins. We shall be lending our countenance to an erroneous belief." But we have before us the example of the Apostle, who lent his countenance to an effete and dead system —that system which was found in the temple, and which Christianity was to supersede. To that system Paul lent his countenance when he did not believe in it. He did not believe in the altar. It was a void, an empty thing to him. But other people believed in it, and therefore he permitted it to do its work for him. He put himself by the side of men who were less instructed than he was; who were wrapped in prejudices; he went with them; yea, and for their sake, he conformed to things externally that to him were nothing. Why did he do it? On the same principle on which he made himself "all things to all men"—"*that he might win some.*"

If a man conforms to superstitions because he does not care for truth, that is wicked; but if a man has a zeal of God, which is always a zeal of love, and for the sake of winning men to a higher life, conforms to things which he has outgrown, but which others have not—that is to say, acts by the side of men without coming into unnecessary jar and conflict with their educated beliefs—he does right.

It is a narrow orthodoxy that cannot work with anything but it self. God, that spreads the sun everywhere over the world, works with everything—even with devils. And they that are of God feel a certain omnipresence of charity And they can include in their honest zeal of love, every human creature, high or low; and yet without endorsing their specific beliefs because they work with them.

When, during the terrible disaster at New Hamburg, men were rushing in crowds to rescue from the wrecked cars those that were in them, or to drag from the water those that had been thrown into it, do you suppose it was necessary for them to stop and say, "Are you a Republican? or are you a Democrat? Because I am not going to be seen working alongside of a man not of my political belief, and have people suppose that I endorse all his abominable political doctrines?" Would not that have been monstrous? And yet, in Brooklyn, within my time, for years and years, the Sunday schools of the Unitarian churches were not allowed to walk in procession with the Sunday schools of the orthodox churches, on anniversary days; and the Unitarian churches had to draw off their schools and form processions on other days; because it was feared that the little orthodox children would catch some heresy from the little Unitarian children, if they were allowed to walk with them in the streets! Over that scene, Christ was sad, and the devil was glad!

Why, if you have the power of Christ with you; if you are earnest, honest, genuine in your love of Christ, and if, above all other things, you have the gift of God, there is not a human being on earth that worships, that you cannot go and worship with him. What if he is not worthy? You have nothing to do with that. You stand or fall to your own Master. But the zeal of love makes you brother to him. I could sit and worship in many a Unitarian church; in many a Universalist church; in many a Swedenborgian assembly. I could sit and worship to edification in many an old hoary church of Rome, and in many a High Episcopal church. I could sit and worship with my Methodist brethren, or with my Baptist brethren. I could go through the water, if there were any moral end to be secured by it. I would not hesitate to be immersed,

as I immerse others, if so I could gain others. What is immersion or sprinkling to me? These things are as nothing. They are but the straw. Straw may be very necessary to bear up the wheat; but when the wheat has been borne up till it has ripened, then I want the wheat, and not the straw. But churches often save the straw and chaff, and let the wheat go where it will!

But many feel bound to be witnesses for the true religion. Now, I can understand that in corrupt periods, in times of darkness, and as a transient device by which to produce a moral impression, ministers and churches may hold themselves exclusive. I can understand that, where a church has corrupted the notions of the community, a handful may separate themselves from it, and refuse to commune with it, without necessarily violating the spirit of love, because they are trying to make an impression in favor of a higher spirituality. For a limited period, and for a specific purpose, that may be right; but ordinarily such exclusiveness would not be right.

There be many persons who will not commune at the Lord's table in their own church. Why? Because there is a wicked family going to sit down there, and their conscience will not permit them to sit down at the Lord's Table with a family that is so notoriously wicked. It may be that they have taken the wickedest advantage of you; it may be that they have robbed you of your property or your good name; but they shall give account of their conduct to God, as you shall of yours. You go to the Lord's Table to commune with your Lord. And you might just as well say that you would not live in the same town with these people, or that you would not obey the same laws that they obey, or that you would not drink water out of the same river that they do, or that you would not take the same sunshine that they take, or receive the same showers that they receive, as to say that you will not go to the same church that they go to, or sit at the same table that they sit at. To your own Master you stand or fall. You might sit at the Lord's Table with a pirate on one side of you, and a murderer on the other, and it would be no testimony that you believed in piracy or murder. It would simply be a testimony that you sought Christ for yourself. The Church of England has been thrown into a nine days' horror because a Socinian scholar was allowed to sit at the communion table with orthodox scholars! It was not the Bishop's table. They were not Lords, giving entertainments to their Peers. They were themselves but miserable sinners asking God's grace among other sinners equally miserable.

Nay, more than that, if I thought that by going into an assembly of heretics I could leaven heresy with orthodoxy, or substitute ortho-

doxy for heresy, and replace lies by truth, I would not hesitate to go among them. I will associate with those that are out of the way if I can do good thereby. The whole theory of the Gospel, the whole spirit of Christ, is opposed to that rigidity, to that fear of compromising orthodoxy, which has prevailed in the Christian Church.

"Well, but, is there not to be a distinction between truth and error, and between good men and bad men?" Oh, yes, righteousness is to be the distinction. A better spirit is to be the distinction. A truer, deeper love is to be the distinction. More disinterested zeal is to be the distinction. A purer spirituality is to be the distinction. The distinction between a man and his fellow-man is not to be in the shape of his hat, nor in the cut of his coat, nor in the color of his garments. The marks of distinction are not necessarily to be external. You are to be more disinterested than they are. You are to be more free from pride and anger than they are. You are to be more richly bountiful, more nobly generous, more truly liberal, than they are. Such is to be the distinction between you and the world.

Here is a miserable old cinnamon rose, that does not bear blossoms to amount to anything; but it is very proud because it stands in rich, yellow loam. And it has great contempt for that damask rose, which stands in gravel and naturally poor soil, although it is covered with fine blossoms. The blossoms on the cinnamon rose are wretchedly poor; they look like an old bachelor's niggardly kiss, all shriveled and shrunk up; but the blossoms on the damask rose are large and beautiful and fragrant; and yet, the cinnamon rose will not commune with the damask rose. Why? Because it stands in sacred yellow loam! It makes no account of the fact that it has poorer leaves and poorer blossoms, and is poorer every way, than the other rose.

And so it is with Christians. You shall see poor, starveling Christians in fair pots, and rich, plump, blossoming Christians in poor pots. Here is a miserable, leafless, blossomless Christian; but he has got into a High-Church pot; and he will not speak to one of those great blossom-bearing Methodist people in that vulgar tub!

Is it not time, now that Christianity has traveled down as far as to our day, that at last we should learn that in Christ Jesus all are one, and that the point of unity does not lie in creeds, nor in Church forms, nor in Church ceremonies, nor in Church governments, nor in Church polity. The unity which Christ came to bring into the world, is that which comes from that higher state of mind which is the spirit of universal love. There we are to stand together.

Lastly, this history will throw a light upon the spirit of modern reformation. There are many men who think you are not sincere if

you do not tell all you know, and just as soon as it dawns on you. And so, what they got yesterday, they empty themselves of to-day; and what they get to-day they will empty themselves of to-morrow. There are many who think the truth must not be withheld, and that they must be forever gushing, gushing, gushing. There are many who suppose that if a man thinks anything, he must of necessity say it; and that to withhold it is suppression; and that to adapt it to the growing necessities of the community is inconsistent with sincerity.

Now, that a man may have interested reasons for withholding the truth, is certain; but if a man is to let out all he knows and thinks on all occasions, then there are no such hypocrites as schoolmasters—unless it be mothers. A mother does not tell her dear little daughter everything that she knows—not when she is five years old. When she is five years old, she tells her what she needs to know at five years of age. And when she is ten years old, she tells her a great deal more. And when she is fifteen years old she tells her a great many more things. The mother adapts her telling to the need and capacity of the child. For love rules. And the object of truth is not to make a man stand as a light-house and shine out his own glory. Truth is food that we feed to the soul; and we are to adapt it to the soul, as we adapt food to children. It is medicine; and we must use it as medicine. If, therefore, withholding works best for the cause of truth, withhold; and if speaking works best for the cause of truth, speak. We are not half so much under obligation to speak all the truth as we are to keep the unity of the spirit in the bond of perfectness. We owe more allegiance to love than to anything else.

The heart is my master. It is the heart that God crowns. With the heart man believes unto salvation. We are to strive, therefore, to keep our hearts right. And in working for others, our object should be to make the right impression on their hearts. I mean to make men better; and sometimes I do it by silence, and sometimes by oral instruction. And I have a right to exercise my judgment as to the method which it is best for me to pursue.

I do not preach here everything that I think. Why do I not? Because I do not know that I believe it yet. There is nothing in this world that requires such long seasoning and ripening as new thoughts. Men seem to think that the pulpit ought to be like an apple-press where greedy boys run, and each sticks his straw into the vat, and sucks the unfermented juice. The farmer would say to the boys, "No, let the juice stand, and let the impurities be worked off; and then, in six or eight months, you will see the real, true cider, or wine of the apples." And so it is with truth. It takes longer for

the truth to work itself free from impurities than any other thing. And only after it has some age do you know the real quality of truth. And who am I that I should undertake to explore the illimitable fields of truth! The truth requires ages and the concurrent thoughts of myriads of men, to give it confirmation. God does not reveal the truth through single heads, but by multitudes and through the ages.

Therefore, for a man who has a brilliant idea to rush at once into publicity with it, is not acting in the spirit of true charity, nor according to the dictates of sound philosophy. It is not the duty of investigators to make known their discoveries, or fancied discoveries, instantly. I would say to every young preacher or teacher, You are not bound to say things just because you have thought of them, or because they seem to you to be true. You have a higher mission. You are sent into the world to lead men to God and heaven. And it is your business, as far as you can, to do it by old truths. But so far as it is necessary for you to have newer truths, if you can find them, use them. I am bound to take care of God's children, that are so dear to him. My children, the babes that blossomed in my household, were dear to me as myself, and were a part of myself; and into what paroxysms of indignation would I have been thrown if any nurse had played experiments on those babes! And God looks with indignation upon men who are playing fantastic tricks with his children, by their crude philosophies and half-fledged notions of theology, no matter under what names they are doing it.

Your allegiance is to God, and to the souls of your fellow-men; and these other things are subsidiary and instrumental. The great end to be sought is the elevation, the ennobling, and the salvation of men. Do not lose sight of that, whatever means your judgment may lead you to employ in bringing it about. And remember that they who turn many from their sins, shall themselves at last shine as stars in heaven.

PRAYER BEFORE THE SERMON.*

Again, blessed Saviour, thou hast been in our midst, and little children have come unto thee. Thou hast called them. Thou hast taken them, as it were, in thine arms, and laid thine hands upon them, and blessed them. Bless them from day to day. And grant that the blessing of love and wisdom in their parents may be to them as a crown of gladness all the days of their life. Oh, how many weary steps must their little feet tread! Oh, how many unknown ways must they pursue! What storms shall beat upon them! No love can shelter them from pain, and sorrow, and temptation, and sin, and repentance, and sin again. They must take up their march in the long and weary procession which has been moving through the world since the race began.

God of our fathers, and our God, whose mercy has been upon us, and in whose strength we have been able to walk, and whose love has watched over us, and whose spirit has been breathed into us, vouchsafe that same mercy to these little ones that has been vouchsafed to us. And grant that their lives may be preserved. Or, if they are ordained to go early, grant that their parents may be comforted, and that they may be purified by zeal for the inheritance of life.

We pray that in all the families of this Church the truth may abide, as in a temple. And while parents have their children with them, may they guide them; and may they not forget, from day to day, to give thanks to God for all the mercy which he has bestowed upon them through their children. For the joy which they have had, for the instruction which they have received while instructing their children, for all that they have learned of Christlike ways, for all that they have learned of self-sacrifice, by giving their lives for the lives of others, may they give thee thanks.

And we pray that wherever thy Spirit dwells in any household, it may be rich and strong. And in any household where the light of thy love is not, let it be kindled. Let there be no family in our midst which has not an altar of Devotion. Let no parent who is attempting to rear a household of children, be ignorant of God from whom all their mercies come. We pray that parents may be a blessing to their children, and that children may be a blessing to their parents. And may they both live in the purest joy which is possible to this hither life. Grant that they may live with something of immortality in that life.

And we beseech of thee, O Lord our God! that thou wilt grant to this whole Church the Spirit of Christ. May the young that are in our midst come up continually in memory before us. May we pray for them, in the sanctuary and in the household. And we beseech of thee that thou wilt grant that the prayers of parents that can no longer be heard on earth, for their children, may at last be effectual; and may many be brought back by the memory of the petitions of their father and mother in their behalf. And may the teachings of their parents at last take effect, and they be held by a secret anchor amidst the currents and storms of life.

And we pray that thou wilt bless all that labor for the young, in Sabbath-schools and Bible-classes. We pray for thy blessing upon teachers that in schools are from day to day seeking to instill knowledge, and especially that knowledge which is the foundation of a virtuous character, into the minds of those that are under their charge. May they more and more feel the Spirit of Christ, and be sustained by the comforting hope of immortality.

And we pray that thou wilt remember those who have none to care for them; whose parents are their worst foes. Raise up friends for those who

* Immediately following the baptism of children.

are outcasts. May they be rescued from temptations that are carrying them away as a flood.

And may this whole community be cleansed of immorality and of animalism. And more and more may men believe in morality and virtue and true piety. May men learn the things that pertain to a true charity. We pray that thou wilt cleanse the hearts of men from all bitterness, and all evil and malign passions, and all things that are unholy. And we pray that the whole community among whom we dwell may be shaped more and more to the true forms which religion inspires.

Bless thy Churches that are laboring for thy cause. May they have religion from on high. And through their instrumentality may thy people be brought more and more unto thee. We pray for the spread of thy Gospel throughout our land. We pray for its establishment where it has not yet gained a footing. We pray for its perfect work where it is but imperfectly developed. We pray for its power to reform laws and magistracies wherever they need the touch of the Gospel light.

And we pray that thy kingdom may come, not only in our land, but in all lands throughout the earth. Pity the conditions of men. Make haste, thou that hast given thy Son a sacrifice for the sins of the world, and that in love wilt make that sacrifice effectual—make haste. Let not the years long delay, but bring to pass the glory of thy perfect state—the latter-day glory

And to thy name shall be the praise, Father, Son and Spirit.—*Amen.*

PRAYER AFTER THE SERMON.

Our Father, we pray that thou wilt bring us back again into the Spirit of our Master, and into the spirit of the Apostles. May we be ashamed of our childish faiths in things external. May we take them or reject them as we take or reject garments of colors. May we seek charity out of a pure heart and a good conscience. May we seek to live in the spirit of true love. And bring us at last to that haven where we shall see thee, and all shadows shall depart, and truth shall become to us as the breath of our life. And to thy name shall be the praise forever more.—*Amen.*

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